

Story 708 (1966 Tape 3)

Narrator: Nürettin Tarhan, minor
official at Hacettepe
Hospital, Hacettepe
University, at Ankara

Location: Tuslucu kaza, Kars
Province

Date: Summer 1966

The Old Man's Three Sons

*Yüzütlü Sen
Seyyid*

TEK

Once there was and once there was not, when the sieve was in the straw and the camel was a town crier, there was an old man who had three sons. One day these three young men went to their father and said, "Father, we wish to go and seek our fortunes."

"If that is what you wish," he said, "then you have my permission to do so."

After receiving his consent, the three brothers set out together. They went a little way; they went a great distance, and after a while they came to a city where they met a

¹ This is a badly told tale from beginning to end. The narrator is unfamiliar with the oral tradition, and so, wishing to be included in the storytelling session, he has patched together largely unrelated elements from two or three different tales. For example, when three sons leave their father's home to determine which can earn (or otherwise achieve) most in a specified time, they do not do so spontaneously of their own volition. They are ordinarily sent out by the father, often to determine which of them is best qualified to be his heir or to succeed him.

Story 708

merchant, who asked them, "What are you doing here?"

"We have come to seek employment. If we find work here we shall do it."

"What are you prepared to do?" he asked them.

The oldest brother said, "I am a hunter."

The middle brother said, "I am a fisherman."

The youngest said, "I am an itinerant laborer."

"I shall hire all three of you," said the merchant. To the oldest he said, "You will go and hunt." To the middle brother he said, "You will go and fish." And to the youngest he said, "You will stand by and be ready to work when I need you."

When the oldest and the middle brother left to engage in their respective jobs, the youngest brother was shut up in a coal cellar. Waiting there, he soon heard someone approaching. A woman entered the coal cellar without knocking on the door. She was startled to see the boy there, and so she asked, "Are you a supernatural being or a jinn?"² *Jinn*
Gifari

"I am neither of these," he answered, "but a son of human beings."

"Well, what are you doing here?" she asked.

After he had told her his life story, she said, "Follow me." She took him upstairs to a well-set dinner table and

² This question is always asked in a rhyming formulaic construction: In misin, cin misin?

61,63,65,67

61,63,65,67

Story

gave him a good meal. After he had finished eating, she said, "My husband is due home soon. I should not like to have him see you here with me. Return now to your place in the cellar."

"No, I shall not. I intend to remain right here."

"Why won't you go? What is your reason for remaining?"

"I will go if you will give me your golden earrings."

The woman, wishing very much to have him leave, ^{for} took off her golden earrings and placed them on the table. The boy then picked up these pieces of jewelry and returned to the coal cellar.

The merchant arrived home shortly after that, and not long after him came the two older brothers. Each of the brothers produced the money he had earned that day and placed it on the table. One had earned ten kuruş and the other five kuruş, but the youngest brother had not earned any money.

In the morning they departed and headed toward another city to seek work. They traveled a little way; they went a great distance, and they soon reached their destination. In that second city they were also accosted by a merchant who asked them, "What are you doing here?"

"We have come seeking work. We have been idle for so many days. If you have any work to be done, we shall be glad to do it."

"What kind of work do you do?"

Story 708

The oldest brother said, "I am a hunter."

The middle brother said, "I am a fisherman."

The youngest said, "I am an itinerant laborer."

"I shall hire all three of you for today," the merchant said. After sending the two older brothers to do their usual kind of work, he took the youngest and locked him in a woodshed.

The youngest had not sat there very long when he heard footsteps approaching. A woman opened the door and entered the woodshed, but she was startled to find a young man there.

"Are you a supernatural being or a jinn?" she asked. *Found in Ex*

"I am neither of those, but a human being," he said.

Then he added, "Wherever I go I am asked that question: 'Are you a demon or a jinn?' Why do you all ask that question? Can't you see with your own eyes what I am?"

The woman then asked him, "Why did you come here?"

"I came here with my two older brothers to find work. One of my brothers is a hunter and the other a fisherman. I told your husband that I was a day laborer, and he put me here."

"Follow me," said the woman, and she led the young man upstairs. There he sat down at a table full of food and ate all he wanted. When the time was approaching for her husband to return, she said, "My husband will be here soon, and so it is time now for you to return to the woodshed."

Story 708

I do not want to go back to the woodshed."

"Why not?"

not go unless you will give it to me."

The woman was quite helpless in this situation, and she finally had to give him what he wanted in order to make him leave. Taking the golden bowl and placing it in the bag he carried on his back, the young man returned to the woodshed.

When the merchant arrived home, he released the youngest brother from the woodshed and took him to a room in the house where the two older brothers awaited them. Each of the brothers reported to his master what he had done that day, and then, their services completed, they were given permission to leave the next day.

They started traveling again in the morning. They went little; they went far, and after a while they arrived at still another city. Again a merchant approached them and asked, "What are you doing here?"

"We are seeking work.

"What kind of work can you do?"

The oldest brother said, "I am a hunter.

middle brother said, "I am a fisherman.

youngest said, "I am a day laborer.

merchant agreed to hire all three for a day. After sending the two older brothers to carry on their usual work

Story 708

the merchant took the youngest and confined him in the cellar. As before, when the woman of the house came to the cellar, she was surprised to find him there. Immediately she inquired, "Are you a supernatural being or a jinn?" *Jinn*

Very irritated at hearing this question addressed to him again, the boy shouted, "I am tired of such questions 'Where do you come from?' and 'Are you a jinn?' Of course not! I am a son of mankind!"

"I wanted to know only who and what you are."

"Well, I tell you that I am a human being and a son of man. I warn you not to talk so much!"

The woman said, "Please be quiet, for you have no reason to be so angry. Come with me

She took him upstairs and there had him sit at a splendid dinner table holding foods of all kinds, as well as tea and coffee. When he had eaten his fill, the woman said, "Now it is time for you to return to the cellar, for my husband will soon be home."

Glancing to the right and to the left, the young man saw a golden pitcher standing on a shelf. To himself he said "If I leave this room without taking that golden pitcher, I am no man!" To the woman he said, "No.

"Come, now! Leave the room at once!"

"No!"

"Why not?"

Story

"I first want to have a wish fulfilled

"What is it? I shall grant it if I am able to do so.

"Do you see that golden pitcher on the shelf? That is what I want."

right, you may have it," she said, handing him the pitcher. Placing this in his bag, he tied the drawstring at the top, and returned to the cellar.

That evening the three brothers reported their day's activities to the merchant, who was satisfied with their work and gave them permission to leave in the morning. But later that evening the three decided to return home. "When we get there, we shall be asked by our father, 'What did each of you earn?' Therefore, let us now tell each other what we have earned. Here are my total earnings." Saying this, he placed upon the table forty-five liras.

"Here are my earnings," said the middle brother, putting sixty liras on the table

When the youngest brother said nothing, the others asked him, "Well, what have you earned?"

"I have earned nothing at all. At every place where we have stopped, I have been scolded and locked up in the cellar or the woodshed, where I sat doing nothing all day.

"But what will you tell our father?"

"Leave that to me. I know what I shall tell him. Before

Story 708

returning home, I wish to go somewhere by myself to try to find work."

The next day he went to a nearby town. As he entered town, he saw many people walking in the same direction. "Where are you all going?" he asked. Most of the people ignored him, for he looked like a beggar, but finally one answered his question

"We are going to see a world beauty--the most beautiful girl in the world--who has moved here. She is so beautiful that one can hardly find eyes to look at her or words to describe her."

The youngest brother joined the crowd and went to the home of this beauty, who lived in a mansion attended by forty maidens. After the rest of the people had viewed the beauty and left, the youngest brother advanced to where the maidens sat. He looked so shabby that the women could not decide whether he was a keloğlan³ or some other kind of creature.

"Are you a supernatural being or a jinn?" they asked him. *Forger*

"I am neither, but instead, a human being." *6/6*

³ Keloğlan means literally bald boy. His baldness is the result of ringworm. It is thought that youngest children of rural families are likely to be afflicted with this disease. The keloğlan is viewed sympathetically and thought to be lucky. Any poor and shabby young child, however, may have the term keloğlan applied to him, whether or not he is actually bald.

Story 708

"What are you doing here?"

am only a poor and lonely man. May I remain here as your guest for the night?"

"Wait right here for a moment until we have asked our lady.

When the lady was informed of his request, she said, "Let me see this person first." When he was brought before her, she asked, "What do you want, uncle?"

"Lady, this is the situation," he answered. "I am a poor man without a place to lodge. If it is possible, please permit me to remain here for the night."

"I should be willing to house you, but I have no suitable place for you to sleep

"I could sleep right here in this corner under the staircase, on the floor, if you do not object."

"Very well," she said to him. And to her servants said, "Bring a mattress and put it there for this young man."

After dinner the youngest brother retired to his bed, but he did not sleep, for though his body was tired, his mind was wide awake. Taking out the earrings which he had received, he placed them on the table and pretended to work on them. He worked all night long, "Tak! Tak! Tak!" disturbing the sleep of the lady and her companions.

In the morning the lady said to him, "You made so much

noise last night that we could hardly sleep. What were you doing?"

"Well, I did not know what to do to repay the kindness you had shown to me, and so I decided to make something for you." Saying this, he took out the golden earrings and placed them on the table. "I am presenting you with these earrings to express my thanks for your hospitality to me."

"Well, what do you wish for them?"

"I wish nothing but your health."⁴

"No, that is not enough. I shall not accept these earrings for nothing. You must tell me what you wish for them."

"Well, in that case, I would take 50,000 liras." When she gave him this sum of money, he placed it in his pocket⁵

asked, as one final favor, to see her face once more. Then he departed.

He went somewhere during the day, but again that night he stayed at the mansion of the world beauty. Again he worked noisily at night, and this time the lady and her companions

⁴ In Turkish folktales this is the traditional demurral made by anyone about to be rewarded by a sultan or king. After two such demurrals, the person may, in good taste, name what he or she wishes from the monarch.

⁵ This is a bit of modernization or acculturation, for the traditional Turkish baggy trousers (şalvar) do not have pockets. Men carried their money and other small items either in the bosom of a shirt or tucked into a sash or cummerbund.

Story 708

were angered: "This is the second night that we have gone without sleep because of his noisiness."

When one of the maidens came to see what he was doing he said to her, "Please take this golden bowl to your lady. It is a gift from me."

Greatly impressed, the lady said, "I shall accept this, but I must know its value so that I can give that amount to him."

As before, he at first refused to name any price for the bowl, but after they had insisted that he do so, he finally agreed to take such-and-such an amount of money. It was a large amount.

When the youngest son repeated for a third night his hammering and noisiness, the lady exclaimed, "I have had enough of this fellow! Throw him out!"

Knowing that they would attack him after he had made so much noise, the young man had prepared his explanation, and when the maidens came to him angrily, he said, "By God, I shall never forget the kindness shown to me here. Therefore, I am presenting this golden pitcher to the lady and asking, on this last day in her home, that she forgive my rough Kurdish dialect."⁶

⁶ This is the first mention of "Kurdish dialect." Apparently it is not to be taken literally but is meant, figuratively, to refer to his general roughness and loudness. The nomadic Kurds are legendary for what seem to sedentary people their ill-mannered and uncouth ways. This is in part a matter of ethnic prejudice.

Story 708

This was such a gorgeous golden pitcher that it glittered brightly in the light. The lady could not help but accept it. (Who would not accept it? If I saw such a pitcher, even I would accept it.)⁷ After she had received it, the lady told her maidens to find out what the young man wished in return

"Our lady wishes to know what you will accept in return for the golden pitcher.

When the price was greater than the lady could pay, youngest brother said, "Then I shall take whatever amount can pay, if she will come back and forth before me three times with her bodice undone.

When this wish was made known to the lady, she said, "Well, that is no great matter. After all, he is only a grant, and so I shall do it." As she walked before the youngest brother, the lady smiled.

"Why do you smile? Do you see anything funny about he asked

"No, not at all. I just happened to remember something amusing. Now, is there anything else you wish from me?"

"Nothing but your ladyship's good health."

Leaving the home of the great beauty, the youngest son rejoined his brothers, and the three of them traveled home-

⁷This is an interpolated passage in which the narrator momentarily drops his role as storyteller and addresses his listeners personally.

Story

ward together. After a long and difficult journey they one day arrived at their native city.

One day shortly after their return, their father called his three sons together. "My sons," he said, "you have been away from home for a long while working and earning money. Let me see now how much money each of you has brought back."

The oldest brother laid out twelve liras, which was all that he had left of his earnings after paying the expenses of his trip home. The middle brother laid out fifteen or sixteen liras. Turning now to the youngest son, their father asked, "And how much did you return with?" The youngest then took from his bag large wads of money--thousands and thousands of liras.

When the two older brothers observed this, they were at first surprised and then annoyed. They asked him, "Where did you get all of this money? You did nothing but walk around from morning till night!"

father then asked the oldest brother, "What did you do while you were away?"

"I hunted."

When the middle brother was asked the same question, he said, "I was a fisherman."

Pointing to the youngest son, the father then said, "This fellow did nothing from dawn to dusk, and yet he has

Story 708

come home rich. During the same period of time, you both worked hard and returned with so little. How can you explain this? He shall be my heir, for I have no need of such good-for-nothing sons as you."

Hearing this judgment, the two older brothers departed from their father's house. The youngest remained. He began at once to have both his father's house and his mill rebuilt

improved upon. Greatly pleased with this, his father one day decided to have this bachelor son married. He went to visit an old friend who had a daughter of an age to be married. "Selâmünaleyküm," he greeted his friend.

"Aleykümselâm," his friend returned.⁸

For some time the two men chatted about this and that,⁹ after a while the host asked the guest about the reason his visit. "What is it that has given me the good for-of this visit with you?"

"I shall tell you. I have come with the permission of Allah and the approval of the Prophet to ask for the hand of

⁸These are the traditional Muslim greetings: "Peace be unto you," and "And may peace be unto you also."

⁹A guest never states his reason for coming until he is invited to do so. Until the host asks for his reason, the guest politely and cheerfully engages in the more-or-less ritual conversation initiated by the host. In this type of exchange very little of a substantive nature is communicated. It is, rather, an exercise in cordiality and courtesy.

Story 708

your daughter for my son."¹⁰

His friend agreed to this, and the two men then set terms for the marriage. The girl's father said, "I shall ask only 100 liras as bride wealth."¹¹

Counting out this amount of money into his friend's hand, the father of the boy said, "If that is all you will ask for, this is an easy matter." The young people were thus engaged.

After the engagement had continued for a year, the son one day said, "Father, I have already been a bachelor too long. This being engaged is not very satisfactory. We live apart, and she is far from me all the time. I want to marry now, for I am already thirty-five years old."

"Very well, son. Do not become anxious about it, for we shall attend to all of the arrangements."

Invitations were sent out to all of the neighboring villages, saying, "We are to celebrate a wedding on such-and-such a day. Please come." At the appointed time a great many guests arrived--so many, in fact, that it looked

¹⁰This is the formulaic statement virtually always used as the opening remark in matchmaking discussions.

¹¹Bride price (euphemized by anthropologists to bride wealth) is the amount paid to the bride's father by either the groom or the groom's father. Turkish: başlık.

Story 708

like Judgment Day.¹² A drum and a zurna played for forty days.¹³ In this way the youngest son was married, and he and his bride found their happiness.

And may God grant you your happiness too! Three apples fell from the sky: one for the teller of this tale, one for the listener, and one for anyone who says, "Where is mine?"

¹²When the countless generations of people arise from their graves on Judgment Day, the earth will be densely crowded.

¹³The zurna is a double-reed wind instrument common in Turkey. It, like the drum, is an absolute "must" for village weddings. The music goes on for fifteen or sixteen hours per day!